



# **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

## **School Accreditation**

This report is prepared following two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit as well as any further findings made during the second visit.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

### **Little Montessorians Pre-school**

The Scout Hut, Roding Lane South, Ilford, Essex IG4 5PD

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: May 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 21 January 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 27 April 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years.

#### **Description of the school:**

Little Montessorians Pre-school was established in 1998 and re-registered by the current owner/manager in 2005. The school occupies a scout hall on the edge of Roding Valley Park, giving easy access to woodland which the school uses for outdoor learning. There is also a fenced play area adjacent to the hall.

Inside the hall there is one large classroom, cloakroom facilities, a kitchen and two storage cupboards, where the setting's equipment is stored when the scout group is using the hall. The school is open during term time from 09.00 to 12.30 every morning and there are also afternoon sessions from 12.30 to 15.00 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Children who stay all day bring in a packed lunch. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were 20 children attending the morning session, one of whom was under 3 years of age. Nineteen children attended the afternoon session, two of whom were under 3 years old. The maximum number of children attending any session is 21 and there are 28 children on roll. There are seven members of staff including the manager and deputy manager, who covers for the manager in her absence. All have relevant childcare qualifications; the manager holds a Montessori teaching qualification, Early Years Professional Status and is a qualified Forest School Leader.



## Summary

Little Montessorians Pre-school offers young children a very high quality Montessori education. The manager is committed to ensuring that every child has access to activities that challenge and inspire them and she shows the same commitment in developing the staff team, providing excellent continuing professional development opportunities for them. Parents are very well informed with regard to their children's learning and they speak highly about how knowledgeable staff members are about their children and about their passion for Montessori education. In response to the recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation the staff team has reviewed and added to the activities in the outdoor area, and this worthwhile development has continued in between the re-accreditation visits.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed the points for action recommended on the first visit, and this merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following point for further development:***

to continue with the planned renewal of Montessori materials.

### **Philosophy:**

The school's mission is to "deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage ('EYFS') in conjunction with the philosophy, practices and method of education of Dr Maria Montessori ...". This is stated on the website, in the prospectus and also in the information file which is given to new parents. Furthermore, parents can read about Montessori when they log in to the school's web-based recording system. The staff team has given a lot of thought to how to share information about Montessori education with the families that use the school and an annual 'Partnership with Parents' review is used to evaluate how successful they have been.

The manager works with the staff to set goals for the school which relate directly to the Montessori approach and these are reviewed annually, when there are changes in legislation, and also when individual staff members gain new knowledge from attending training and workshops. The children's outstanding attitude to learning indicates that the adults put their excellent knowledge of Montessori philosophy into practice.

### **Learning and Development:**

The majority of children attend the school for every session. During the work cycle they are free to choose activities from any area of the classroom, to help themselves to a snack or to go outside with a member of staff. The children at Little Montessorians are



confident learners as they move between the creative area, snack area and the Montessori shelves. The classroom is arranged by Montessori areas of learning and the activities are easily accessible. The adults are excellent role models – they calmly observe the children and when a child asks for help they give just enough assistance to allow the child to finish the task themselves. The adults encourage them to take care of the environment and to put things away when they have finished.

All staff members are involved in planning and in choosing topics for the whole school. Key persons use the school's secure web-based system to record their key children's learning and development; this effectively links Montessori areas of learning to those of the EYFS within the child's Learning Journey and the staff also use the system to plan possible next steps for their key children, as well as to generate reports. Parents can log in to see their child's progress and they are also able to make suggestions and add to their child's records.

Although there is no direct access to the outside fenced play area children may ask an adult to accompany them at any time during the work cycle. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit a group of children asked to go outside and pushed wheelbarrows to transport stones to fill holes in the ground. They used shovels to smooth the stones and continued until all of the holes were filled.

The manager has completed Forest School training and regularly takes small groups of children to visit the adjacent woodland for nature walks and other activities such as storytelling. This adds a much valued resource to the nursery's activities.

The manager is also the setting's Special Educational Needs Coordinator and she works closely with staff members who have key children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language. This work also entails establishing important links with parents and outside agencies, such as local authority advisors. The use of home languages is encouraged, for instance during circle time when children are invited to respond to greetings in any language they choose. Children and staff also have access to a book which contains a picture timetable of a typical day, with captions in different languages.

### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

Little Montessorians is a very well-equipped school. The Montessori materials are appropriate to the developmental stage of the children attending the school. Since the first re-accreditation visit the manager has developed a planned schedule to replace some of the older pieces of Montessori equipment. This is usefully linked to the setting's future budgeting. Purchased and hand-made resources are provided to complement the Montessori materials and extend the children's learning, and new items are introduced to support topic work, such as the addition of a giant snake puppet relating to the 'Africa' topic.

There are sufficient materials for children to work individually or in small groups



together, and children use floor mats and table mats to define their working spaces. The staff also use iPads to support children's learning. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the deputy manager used her iPad to show children some video footage of a group of Masai warriors performing a jumping dance – the children were excited and wanted to see if they could jump as high as the warriors.

Because many of the additional learning materials are stored in cupboards, the manager has compiled a useful pictorial inventory so that staff can easily find these and use them for topics and other work. Children are given the resources to help keep their environment in good order, such as dustpans and brushes, and staff members actively encourage them to take this responsibility.

Since the first visit the outside activities have been extended and now reflect the excellent range of learning activities available in the classroom. All areas of learning are represented, and a good proportion of the activities are available regardless of the weather. On the second visit outside activities included a digging patch, herb garden, planting area, a mud-kitchen, an insect 'tally chart', a water wall, an obstacle course, counting activities, musical instruments and boxes of items such as language activities, binoculars, bubble-makers and bug-hunting kits.

### **Montessori practice: independence, including independence at home, freedom, respect**

The children show an extremely high level of independence. When they first join the school they are shown around the classroom by their key person who also shows them how to use the snack table and cloakroom and explains clearly the other daily routines to them. This is exemplary practice because the staff members understand that this helps children to settle quickly and to become confident and competent learners.

The snack table is in a corner of the classroom and children help to prepare the food, for example by chopping vegetables, making butter with a hand operated churn and using a toaster to make their own toast for snack. Children's independence is well supported by a pictorial chart showing how to use the snack area and the adults respect the children's desire to do so by themselves.

Children change into their outdoor clothes when they want to go outside and help to lay out cushions for groups. Throughout the work cycle children are free to choose whichever activities interest them, and to work on them for as long as they wish to, individually or with others. On the day of the first visit one child was determined to join a small group who were sewing hand-puppets and spent the entire work cycle completing sewing cards in preparation for this task.

Children are involved in establishing the ground rules for the classroom and these are displayed on a poster. This helps them to understand the purpose and meaning of the rules and engages them effectively. In addition, the adults use stories and puppets to help children understand their emotions and they also introduce them to exercises in



grace and courtesy. This helps children to learn to respect themselves and others, to resolve conflicts and to feel secure in knowing what is expected of them. On arrival children are greeted at the door and they show their confidence by shaking hands with the adults in the room and saying 'good morning' to visitors. Information about how to support their child's growing independence is available to parents on the web-based system as well as in their information pack.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

A timetable of daily routines and of individual staff members' responsibilities is displayed on the classroom noticeboard. All staff are expected to familiarize themselves with the school's policies and procedures and to implement them.

The morning work cycle runs from 09.00 to 12.30 and the afternoon work cycle runs from 12.30 to 15.00. At 12.30 children who are not staying for the afternoon session leave and the children who are arriving just for the afternoon start their work cycle. Those who are staying on from the morning eat their packed lunches together at a long table before joining the afternoon children.

A carpeted book area is used for circle time and also provides a comfortable place for children who wish to rest. Little Montessorians uses vertical grouping so that children across the age range work and play together, which helps the younger ones to benefit from the role models provided by the older children. Although children are assigned to a key person they may ask any adult for help and all adults are able to record observations in children's Learning Journeys. The classroom is very well organised and the routines flow seamlessly because the adults follow the needs of the children.

### **Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records**

The school's links with parents are very strong. When parents first visit they are shown a timeline of the school's day and are given information about the Montessori approach as well as an information pack about the school. Parents can log in to their child's Learning Journey through the school's web-based system and they are actively encouraged to contribute to this record and to share their child's achievements with the key person. Information about topics and other school activities such as sports day and termly parents evenings is also available on the system. If parents have any concerns about their child they are able to make an appointment to meet with their child's key person, and they are also involved in preparation of the mandatory two year old progress check is carried out.

Following any activity involving parents their feedback is sought through a questionnaire so that staff can tailor future activities to meet parents' needs. This good practice is also evident when children's views are sought through questionnaires with which parents can help them to express their likes and dislikes about the school.



When children move to their next school the parents can print their entire Learning Journey from the school's web system, and a transition report is also prepared by the child's key person. The manager uses information from the annual 'Partnership with Parents' review to highlight any areas for possible improvement, such as whether parents for whom English is not their first language are able to adequately access the school's web-based system. This shows the school's commitment to working in full partnership with all parents.

### **Staffing:**

Little Montessorians Pre-school has low staff turnover. On joining the school new staff members complete an induction course, which includes familiarization with the policies, procedures and routines of the school. There is a thorough performance management programme in place that includes annual appraisals, termly supervisions and termly peer observations. The staffing structure is clearly documented and each role has a job description which is reviewed at every appraisal and when new staff members are recruited.

The manager is fully committed to the continued professional development of the team, as evidenced by the high number of local authority and Montessori training provider courses accessed during recent years. Staff training records are kept up to date and the manager also keeps a file to show the impact that training courses have had on the development of the school.

In addition to daily informal discussions about the children, the staff team meets termly for a formal, minuted staff meeting during which they review the setting's goals. Five of the seven members of staff are Montessori qualified and four have degrees. All work part-time; this is taken into account when allocating key children, to help ensure continuity of care for each child.

The staff team at Little Montessorians Pre-school has an excellent understanding of Montessori principles. They work very well together as a team, are excellent role models, and have created an exciting learning environment that motivates children to learn and fully supports their holistic development.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date report submitted: First visit – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Second visit – 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016